

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

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AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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USDEL MBFR VIENNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 3352

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PGOV, UR

SUBJECT: THE 25TH CONGRESS: BREZHNEV AND HIS COLLEAGUES

REF: MOSCOW 3084,

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1. SUMMARY - THE EXTENT TO WHICH BREZHNEV HAS DOMINATED THE CONGRESS IS DIFFICULT TO EXAGGERATE. THE UNMISTAKEABLE INDICATORS INCLUDE:

--THE PREEMINENCE OF HIS ROLE COMPARED TO THE SUBORDINATE POSITION OF OTHER LEADERS, ESPECIALLY KOSYGIN;

--THE PROMINENCE GIVEN HIS ACTIVITIES BY THE MEDIA, BOTH PRIOR TO AND DURING THE CONGRESS;

--HIS BANTER WITH CONGRRESS SPEAKERS;

--ESPECIALLY, THE CONTINUING PRAISE FOR HIS LEADERSHIP ABILITIES AND HIS PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, VOICED BY ALMOST EVERY SPEAKER.

HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE, HOWEVER, DOES NOT RAISE THE SPECTER OF THE "CULT OF PERSONALITY" ALONG STALINIST LINES; RATHER, IT REFLECTS HIS TALENT FOR CONSENSUS POLITICS AND PROBABLY A DEGREE OF GENUINE ESTEEM BY HIS COLLEAGUES, OR AT LEAST A GENERALLY HELD CONVICTION THAT THINGS WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY WORSE OFF WITHOUT HIS RELATIVELY BENIGN PRESENCE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EXTENT OF BREZHNEV'S DOMINATION OF THE CONGRESS IS DIFFICULT TO EXAGGERATE. IT WAS SIGNALLED IN THE OPENING MOMENTS FEBRUARY 24, WHEN BREZHNEV HIMSELF DECLARED THE CONGRESS IN SESSION (IN CONTRAST TO THE 24TH CONGRESS, WHICH WAS OPENED BY SUSLOV). FROM THEN, BREZHNEV HAS BEEN PRAISED -- FREQUENTLY AT LENGTH -- BY EVERY SOVIET SPEAKER. THE TELEVISION CAMERAS HAVE FOCUSED ON HIM AT EVERY OPPORTUNE MOMENT. MENTION OF HIS NAME FROM THE PODIUM VIRTUALLY GUARANTEES APPLAUSE.

3. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, IN A NEW DEPARTURE AT THIS CONGRESS BREZHNEV HAS ON SEVERAL OCASIONS, CAPTURED BY THE TV CAMERAS, INTERRUPTED SOVIET SPEAKERS:

--WHEN S.F. MEDUNOV WAS REPORTING ON WHEAT PRODUCTION IN KRASNODAR RAYON, BREZHNEV ASKED ABOUT RICE. THAT GAVE MEDUNOV THE OPENING TO GIVE BREZHNEV CREDIT FOR AN EARLIER SUGGESTION TO EXPAND RICE CULTIVATION IN THE KUBAN AREA;

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--ON ANOTHER OCCASION, A.V. GEORGIYEV, FIRST SECRETARY OF ALTAY KRAY -- A FORCEFUL, COLLOQUIAL SPEAKER -- GOT SO CARRIED AWAY THAT HE BLURTED OUT "CHORT VOZMI" (EQUIVALENT TO "DAMMIT"). AMID GENERAL LAUGHTER (EVEN KOSYGIN THE DOUR BROKE UP) BREZHNEV ENGAGED IN SOME REPARTEE WITH GEORGIYEV;

--LATER, WHEN A.P. ALEKSANDROV, THE PRESIDENT OF THE USSR ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, WAS DISCUSSING THE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF

ATOMIC ENERGY, INCLUDING THOSE IN MEDICINE, BREZHNEV INTERRUPTED TO ASK IF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY HAD SUCCEEDED IN PRODUCING A "BOMB" FOR THE GRIPPE. ALEKSANDROV DID NOT LOSE HIS APLOMB AND RETORTED THAT AN INSTITUTE OF NUCLEAR PHYSICS DID INDEED PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VACCINE FOR THE GRIPPE, "EXCEPT WE HAVE TO BRING DOWN THE PRICE A BIT;"

--FINALLY, DURING THE REPORT BY KOMSMOL CHIEF YE. M. TYAZHELNIKOV, BREZHNEV CALLED FOR TYAZHELNIKOV TO SHOW HIM THE COPY OF A 41-YEAR OLD PAPER FROM WHICH THE LATTER HAD READ AN ARTICLE IN PRAISE OF YOUNG COMMUNIST BREZHNEV.

4. BREZHNEV'S PREEMINENCE STANDS OUT SHARPLY AGAINST THE LACK OF EMPHASIS ON OTHER MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP. KOSYGIN'S REPORT ON THE ECONOMY WAS NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, CARRIED LIVE ON SOVIET TELEVISION, NOR WAS IT CARRIED IN FULL DURING THE TV RECAP THAT EVENING. WHEN IT APPEARED IN THE PRESS MARCH 2, IT WAS OVERSHADOWED BY BREZHNEV'S MARCH 1 ACTIVITIES. THE FRONT PAGES OF ALL THE CENTRAL NEWSPAPERS CARRIED IN BANNER HEADLINES THE RESOLUTION APPROVING BREZHNEV'S CC REPORT, THE TEXT OF BREZHNEV'S BRIEF MARCH 1 SPEECH AND A LARGE PICTURE OF BREZHNEV DELIVERING IT, PLUS AN ACCOUNT OF BREZHNEV'S MEETINGS WITH BERLINGUER TOGETHER WITH A LARGE PHOTO OF BREZHNEV, BERLINGUER, SOSLOV AND PONOMAREV. KOSYGIN'S PICTURE APPEARED ON PAGE THREE OF ALL PAPERS.

5. IN THIS REGARD, BREZHNEV APPARENTLY WAS ABSENT DURING KOSYGIN'S MARCH 1 SPEECH AND THE REST OF THE PROCEEDINGS THAT DAY, ALTHOUGH THE VIDEO-TAPED TV COVERAGE RARELY INCLUDED A CAMERA ANGLE WHICH SHOWED HIS EMPTY SEAT. SUBSEQUENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS MARCH 1 MEETING WITH BERLINGUER PARTIALLY EXPLAINS HIS ABSENCE. JUDGING FROM THE TV REPLAYS OF THE MARCH 2 SESSION, BREZHNEV MISSED THE ENTIRE DAY. THE TV RECAP OF THAT SESSION WAS MUCH LESS RETICENT ABOUT SHOWING HIS VACANT CHAIR, ALTHOUGH HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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ABSENCE WAS IN NO WAY EMPHASIZED.

6. WE HAVE HEARD NO RUMORS ABOUT BREZHNEV'S ABSENCE FROM THE PROCEEDINGS MARCH 2. IT MAY BE THAT HE WAS RESTING; HE APPEARED TIRED WHEN HE SPOKE THE MORNING OF MARCH 1, AND HIS ENUNCIATION DID NOT SEEM UP TO PAR WITH HIS FEBRUARY 24 PERFORMANCE--ALTHOUGH EVEN ON FEBRUARY 24 HE SEEMED TENSE DURING THE OPENING MOMENTS OF HIS SPEECH, AND ON MARCH 1 HE SPOKE FOR NO MORE THAN FIVE MINUTES.

7. WHILE NO OTHER LEADERS HAVE PLAYED AN UNDULY PROMINENT PART IN THE CONGRESS, WE HAVE SEEN SIGNS THAT SOME INDIVIDUALS MAY BE ON THE WAY UP. AS REPORTED SEPTEL, LONGTIME BREZHNEV ASSOCIATE K.U. CHERNENKO HAD BEEN PUBLICLY LAUDED FOR HIS SERVICE TO PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. SHCHERBITSKIY AND ROMANOV WERE BOOSTED BY CHAIRING THE CONGRESS AHEAD OF OTHER MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP GROUP, AND

LATTER SEEMS AN ESPECIALLY GOOD BET TO ACHIEVE POLITBURO STATUS.

8. COMMENT: THE EMPHASIS ON BREZHNEV IN OUR VIEW SERVES MORE TO RECONGNIZE THE PROMINENCE HE HAD ACHIEVED PRIOR TO THE CONGRESS THAN TO SIGNIFY HIS FURTHER ELEVATION. FOR MONTHS BEFORE THE CONGRESS HE HAS DOMINATED SOVIET MEDIA,AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE GIVEN HIS LATERST PEACE PRIZE,AND BY THE PRAISE LAVISHED ON HIM AT REPUBLIC PARTY CONGRESSES. WHILE SOME WHO LAUDED HIM DURING THE 25TH CONGRESS PROBABLY DID NOT HAVE THEIR HEARTS IN IT,WE HAVE THUS FAR SEEN NOTHING CONNECTED WITH THE GATHERING TO INDICATE THAT HIS MAIN POLICIES ARE UNDER SERIOUS PRESSURE.

9. ALTHOUGH THE PRAISE BREZHNEV RECEIVED FROM CONGRESS SPEAKERS HAS BEEN GENEROUS AND AT TIMES EXTRAVAGANT, IT HAS NOT APPEARED TO CARRY THE POTENTIAL FOR A NEW "CULT OF PERSONALITY" ALONG STALINIST LINES. INDEED,SOME OF THE PRAISE RATHER POINTEDLY SINGLEDOUT THE OPENNESS AND RELAXED STYLE OF HIS LEADERSHIP. IT WAS ALSO NOT UNUSUAL FOR SPEAKERS TO SPREAD EVENHANDED PRAISE BETWEEN HIM PERSONALLY AND THE PARTY ORGANS -- THE POLITBURO AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE -- AND TO REFER APPROVINGLY TO THE COLLEC-TIVE STYLE OF TAKING DECISION FOSTERED BY BREZHNEV. IN SHORT, BREZHNEV'S LEADERSHIP STYLE DOES NOT RESURRECT THE SHADE OF "THE VOZHD" (THE SUPREME LEADER, A LA STALIN) BUT RATHER REFLECTS HIS TALENT FOR CONSENSUS POLITICS AND PROBABLY ALSO A MEASURE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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GENUINELY HIGH REGARD BY HIS COLLEAGUES FOR HIS PERSONAL QUALITIES AND HIS GENERAL PERFORMANCE.
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